

Dr. Patricia Bath, Ophthalmologist and Inventor



Believe in the power of truth. Do not allow your mind to be imprisoned by majority thinking. Remember that the limits of science are not the limits of imagination.

When obstacles were put in front of Patricia Bath, she simply knocked them down. She was not going to let anyone tell her she couldn't do something just because she was a black woman. Her tenacity impacted the world bringing vision to thousands of people.

Patricia Bath was born in Harlem, New York in 1942. As a young child, her parents gave her a chemistry set. This fostered her love of science and she knew that she wanted to become a doctor. After completing high school in just 2 1/2 years, she attended Hunter College majoring in chemistry and physics. She completed her medical degree at Howard University in 1968.

As Dr. Bath started her career as an ophthalmologist, she noticed that blindness in blacks was higher than blindness in whites. Through research she realized that was due to a lack of access to eye care. She realized that there were underserved populations that needed eye care and suggested a new type of ophthalmology called community ophthalmology. Today, community ophthalmology is practiced around the world.

Dr. Bath moved to Los Angeles, California where she was the first woman to teach at the UCLA Jules Stein Eye Institute. She was also the first African American female surgeon at the UCLA Medical Center.

Dr. Bath was a great teacher and doctor. But she wanted to do more to help others. In 1976 she

helped start the American Institute for the Prevention of Blindness. The AIPB works to protect and restore eyesight. In 1988, Dr. Bath changed cataract surgery with her invention of the laserphaco probe. The laserphaco probe removes a cataract using lasers. This process is much more accurate and less invasive than traditional surgery.

Patricia Bath's successes did not come without obstacles. When she first got to the UCLA Jules Stein Eye Institute, her office was in the basement next to lab animals. She refused to use this office as it was inappropriate and was given a better one. In addition, Patricia Bath's work was not properly recognized in textbooks. When she testified in front of the Judiciary Committee on Trailblazers and Lost Einsteins, she stated that, "My contribution was not properly credited in the same manner as other authors."¹ Dr. Bath not only had to overcome racism, she also had to overcome sexism. Her tenacity paved the way for minority women to make their mark in science.

¹ Bath, Patricia. *Testimony of Dr. Patricia E. Bath April 3, 2019 before the Judiciary Committee on Trailblazers and Lost Einsteins: Women Inventors and the Future of American Innovation*. Retrieved from <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Bath%20Testimony.pdf> on June 17, 2020

Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

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1. Give an example from the text that supports the statement that Dr. Patricia Bath had tenacity.

2. In your opinion, which of Dr. Patricia Bath's achievements made the most impact on the world? Provide a reason and text evidence for your opinion.

3. Literally, Dr. Bath brought vision to thousands of individuals. How did she bring vision to people in other ways?

4. Why do you think that Dr. Patricia Bath's work was not properly recognized?
